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## **NEW REALISM IN NORTH KOREAN PROPAGANDA: THE DEATH OF PAK CHONG-CH'OL**

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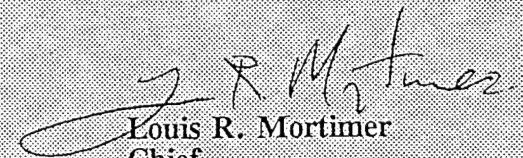
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New Realism in North Korean Propaganda:  
The Death of Pak Chong-ch'ol

North Korea's Voice of National Salvation (VNS) broadcasts to South Korea in January and February gave considerable attention to the 13 January 1987 death under police torture of Seoul National University student Pak Chong-ch'ol. VNS commentary emphasized the routine nature of police torture in South Korea and sharply criticized the South Korean Government for blocking attendance at memorial services on 7 February and 3 March. Many VNS comments on the Pak case closely paralleled reactions of the South Korean press and parliamentary opposition, demonstrating close North Korean attention to opinion trends in the South. In a new mood of realism, P'yongyang also used the Pak case to urge South Korean radical students to drop their "avant-gardism," including excessively leftist slogans and violent tactics that alienate the general populace. P'yongyang clearly wants students to take advantage of issues that have wide public appeal and to broaden resistance to the Chon Tu-hwan Government to include social groups beyond the student population. In P'yongyang's view, such issues include the Pak case and the signature campaign for constitutional revision in early 1986. If South Korea's radical students take P'yongyang's advice, and if the Republic of Korea Government fails to curb and punish abuses like the Pak killing, this shift in tactics could have significant influence during the coming spring demonstration season.

## North Korean Commentary to South Korea on the Pak Chong-ch'ol Case

On 17 January North Korea's Voice of National Salvation (VNS) broadcast discussed the case of Pak Chong-ch'ol, a university student who died during police interrogation. According to the broadcast, Pak was originally arrested under the National Security Law, for taking part in the "anti-US and antidictatorial struggle." VNS criticized the Chon Tu-hwan Government for first denying the cause of Pak's death and then cremating Pak's body to prevent further investigation. VNS also discussed a number of other student deaths that have occurred during the previous year, asserting that such "bestial torture and atrocious murder" was not limited to Pak Chong-ch'ol, but was practiced routinely by the South Korean Government against patriotic students. South Korean youths, students and "people of all strata" in Seoul and elsewhere were described as "burning with indignation and rage" over Pak's murder.

In follow-up coverage VNS criticized the appointment of Chong Ho-yong as home minister in the wake of the Pak case, noting his earlier role as commander of the special forces active in Kwangju in May 1980. VNS described ROK Government promises to investigate future human rights abuses as "an intolerable mockery to our people and world opinion" and called for Chon to step down. Such promises were compared to "a jackal saying that it will bring up its young to be sheep." Subsequently, VNS criticized the South Korean Government for suppression of the 7 February 1987 memorial service for Pak in Seoul and for refusing to allow a Buddhist memorial ceremony scheduled for 3 March. Broadcasts described demonstrations in Seoul and Pusan on 7 February for the benefit of South Korean listeners. According to VNS, the demonstrators shouted slogans such as "return Pak Chong-ch'ol alive," "overthrow the killer regime," and "drive out the US imperialists." A VNS broadcast on 22 February compared the Pak case with that of Kim Chu-yol, the middle school student whose death in 1960 sparked the 19 April uprising against President Syngman Rhee.



경찰이 폭행 차운의 물고문'로.  
Photo by Tonga Ilbo

Tonga Ilbo (Seoul),  
19 January 1987

Caption: "Sketch of water torture of Pak according to police account"

Despite harsh rhetoric concerning the Pak Chong-ch'ol case, many VNS comments about the case and its aftermath paralleled the views of the South Korean parliamentary opposition and the more independent Seoul newspapers (see illustration). In many instances, such topics were raised in South Korean media before they appeared in VNS broadcasts. For example, assemblymen of the opposition New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP) noted earlier cases of torture and suspected police murder just as had the VNS broadcasts. NKDP spokesmen also called for a pan-national movement to protest and investigate police torture.

Seoul newspapers such as the Tonga Ilbo noted the suspicious circumstances of Pak's death, challenged police efforts to minimize Pak's injuries, and noted new Home Minister Chong Ho-yong's involvement with the special forces and the Kwangju incident. One Seoul paper described Pak's killing as "monstrous."

#### New Student Tactics Recommended

VNS treatment of the Pak Chong-ch'ol case illustrates North Korean concern over radical student tactics. A VNS broadcast on 22 February, asking "what should we do at present to lead this struggle for justice to victory?" recommended new tactics to expand opposition over the Pak case to the level of a "nationwide struggle." First, VNS called for more students to join the struggle and to call for a Buddhist 49th day memorial service for Pak on 3 March. As in April 1960, professors and high school and middle school students should join in the protest. Second, VNS called on students to spread resistance to social groups beyond the student population by emphasizing that torture and execution are used against the workers who demand payment of overdue wages and peasants who demand guarantees of a livelihood and suspension of agricultural imports from the United States. According to VNS, religious figures are another such group, victimized by interrogation of ministers and tear-gassing of memorial services such as that for Pak Chong-ch'ol. Third, VNS recommended that the people must be

organized around the Pak Chong-ch'ol case through legal organizations, including committees for investigation of Pak's torture, for opposing torture in general, for cherishing Pak's memory, and for the release of detainees. World opinion should also be aroused through appropriate international organizations.

The North Korean advice in the Pak case was part of a VNS campaign in February and March to try to dampen what P'yongyang clearly believes is excessive leftism among South Korean radical students. VNS noted that the number of participants in the radical student movement in 1986 was fewer than in 1985. Consequently, the "anti-US and antifascist struggle" in the South must change its tactics to end "alienation" of the public and to influence a broader range of the South Korea population. Issues such as the early 1986 signature campaign for constitutional revision and the Pak Chong-ch'ol case provide ideal opportunities for mobilizing more broadly based resistance to the Chon Government than in the past.

VNS broadcasts on this subject generally refrained from direct criticisms of radical students and even praised their work in raising the consciousness of the masses. VNS continued to refer to student activists as a "necessary vanguard," the "forefront of the struggle," and the "forerunners of the times." However, in an unusual step, VNS criticized a now-defunct radical South Korean student organization, Sammint'u (Struggle Committee to Reunify the Nation, Win Democracy, and Liberate the Masses), for "unilaterally forcing 1,000,000 students to follow it, thus becoming isolated" and leading to the collapse of the National Federation of Students in early 1986.

Moreover, each VNS recommendation for organization and mobilization of the "broad masses" contained implicit criticism of tactics and methods currently used by South Korean radical students. For example, VNS urged activist students to stop forming numerous organizations and to work to form a single organization that uses lawful means. Second, slogans should be well chosen to appeal to and get a response from the "broad masses," because slogans and tactics that "go beyond what is reasonable" alienate the masses and retard mass mobilization. One broadcast urged vigilance against "those extreme left-leaning fighting slogans and those radical fighting forms with which the people do not sympathize and that can give the enemy an excuse to brazenly suppress the people." Finally, the methods and tactics of struggle must be changed to appeal to the masses and not give government authorities excuses for repression. As one broadcast expressed it, "the avant-gardist movement based on

illegal and violent struggle took place in part in the student movement in the past with only a few universities and a few vanguard fighters participating. This was not helpful to the advance of the movement. The student movement should thoroughly avoid such phenomena."

#### Outlook

VNS handling of the Pak Chong-ch'ol case shows that North Korea listens to and quotes from the South Korean political opposition, just as radical students in the South sometimes listen to and quote from VNS. North Korea also is clearly concerned at the fate of ultra-radical student groups such as Sammint'u. P'yongyang's new realism undoubtedly is tactical in nature and does not signal any departure from the ultimate goal of promoting revolution in the south. However, at least for the moment, P'yongyang appears to be positioning itself closer to the center of South Korea's opposition opinion and to be encouraging the student radicals to do the same. As the spring demonstration season approaches, it will be worth noting whether the radical students will take P'yongyang's advice and whether the ROK Government will become more effective in preventing and punishing abuses like the Pak killing that stimulate widespread anger and opposition.